

Our Tribute For the Suzerain

By J. Davidson Hero

Colonial Governor Bizroy's head pounded as the sunlight glared in his eyes. His aide-de-camp, Quin, turned from the now opened blinds. Bizroy scratched the floor with his hand searching clumsily for the probably empty bottle of brandy he had been working on. For a moment it was at his fingertips and then it shot away rolling under his desk just as he tried to tame it into his hand.

"It's almost time Sir. The Suzerain will need to be dealt with. We have to keep him happy or you know the consequences."

Bizroy looked for a moment at the aide through half-opened eyes and considered the implications of his statements. What fascinated him more than the implied complexity of Bizroy's own situation was the fact that the aide had actually come to share the governor's worldview.

"Yes, yes Quin. I suppose I'd better get myself ready. Have my dress uniform laid out in my room." The governor thought for a moment, and then noting his dry mouth added, "And have the commissary send up another bottle of brandy."

The aide bowed and left immediately.

Bizroy fumbled through some papers, then fiddled momentarily with the blinds. Outside a seemingly endless arid land stretched out and away. Was he finally growing tired of this? After all these years? Surely the inane chatter of the natives long ago lost its quaint fascination. Surely the climate had taken its toll on his delicate complexion, and to have to walk around daily in this infernal getup. The entire scenario had worn thin. But what was Bizroy's alternative, return home? No, while he wasn't yet a misanthrope, he despised his own culture with a passion. That is why he had joined the Foreign Service to begin with.

It wasn't supposed to be like this, of course. The entire occupation had been boggled right from the beginning. The first governor, Bizroy's then superior, had chosen Australia because of a misunderstanding concerning the phrase "shrimp on the barbie." In addition they had experienced endless technical difficulties. The governor, unstable to begin with, couldn't handle the pressure, and after months of making excuses to the Suzerainty, Bizroy finally concocted the plan. And now twenty years later, maintaining the plan had begun to make Bizroy unstable.

Still, to let it all go... while it would likely mean death for Bizroy, at least after some lengthy investigation by the bureaucracy, he was more concerned about the natives.

It would mean something horrible for them, and though difficult to admit to himself, he did like them. They would surely be eradicated when the Suzerainty discovered that his entire colonial government was a sham.

An hour later Bizroy was sitting in the conference room. He was in his dress uniform and flipped nervously through his notes. At the other side of the room a huge screen was secured to the wall. Currently the screen was black, but occasionally an empty chair would flicker into view in a dark room. In the background behind the chair were banks of lights, panels with buttons, and tiny screens. Further back a large window could be seen and beyond that, endless dark unfathomable waters.

Shortly Quin appeared at Bizroy's side.

"How long?" Bizroy asked feeling agitated.

"Should be any minute now Sir."

Bizroy knew that transmissions from the capital were seldom on time. A lack of punctuality was representative of his species' mind-numbing lack of organization, which was ironic considering the levels of bureaucracy that attempted to mask that fact. They tended to make up for these shortcomings with shortsighted brutality though.

Bizroy continued to stare at the screen. It flickered to black once more, then when the image returned, the Suzerain was there. Bizroy was almost shocked by the image. Perhaps he was 'going native' or perhaps it was just the hatred of his own species. The Suzerain was immense, a bloated purple head, constantly filling and emptying as he breathed. Below the head a passel of tentacles swirled about in what seemed a mindless dance. A razor-sharp beak, gilded and decorated, opened and closed repeatedly, and buried deep in his head, the Suzerain's eyes looked unblinkingly.

"Governor Bizroy, your report," the Suzerain commanded with a long exhale.

"Giddy Suzerain, how's the capital?" Bizroy asked.

"Shrimalla B'be is beautiful this time of year Governor. The grinal-fish are spawning and if you remember, they are delicious." The Suzerain gave a wicked chuckle, and Bizroy knew he had him distracted.

"You really should take some time off and return for a while," he continued.

Bizroy felt more at ease now, knowing the Suzerain was in a relaxed mood.

“No Suzerain, I couldn’t leave my post here. It would take years for me to travel all the way home. Besides, the colony is much too busy.”

“Yes, yes, I suppose, governing an entire planet takes some effort.” The Suzerain seemed to wink, which Bizroy knew was anatomically impossible. Bizroy did wink back though using one of the artificial eyelids that he wore and somehow it made him feel vastly superior.

“Well then, on with your report,” the Suzerain said returning to his officious tone.

“As tribute then the humans have again this year provided...”

“More trinkets and baubles I suppose?” the Suzerain interrupted with conspicuous disgust.

“As I’ve stated before Suzerain, the humans prize these things above all others in their society. For them to provide such a tribute is for them to honor us highly.” An image flashed across Bizroy’s mind of what would happen if the humans knew they were actually under the rule of a colonial government from a far off planet. Violence, bloodshed. It was easier this way, and no one needed to know. So long as Bizroy had the energy to keep the ruse up and had the manpower to continue to secretly collect a passable tribute.

“So Suzerain, as last year the humans have given in tribute, 7 million pairs of socks, 1 million left sneakers, 18 million spoons...”